

THE SOCIALIST PARTY

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 84th AUTUMN

DELEGATE MEETING, HELD AT BEDFORD HOUSE,

LONDON, ON 15th & 16th OCTOBER, 1988

<u>ATTENDANCES</u>	<u>N° of Branches Represented</u>	<u>N° of Delegates Sitting</u>	<u>Branches not Represented</u>
Saturday, 15 October, 11.45am	16	28	Enfield & Haringey, Lancaster, Manchester, Merseyside, Seaham
Sunday, 16 October, 10.30am	14	25	Bournemouth, Enfield & Haringey, Lancaster, NW London, Manchester, Merseyside, Seaham
Sunday, 16 October, 3.00pm	17	30	Bournemouth, Lancaster, Merseyside, Seaham

FINANCIAL REPORT

Collections:

Saturday	£61.54
Sunday morning	£91.80
Sunday afternoon	£52.88
	<u>£206.22</u>

Saturday morning, 15 October

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Comrade G. Slapper was elected to chair the Meeting.

2. ELECTION OF TELLERS AND STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

Comrades P. Bennett and C. Skelton were elected to act as tellers and as Standing Orders Committee for the duration of the Meeting.

3. ORDER OF BUSINESS

C. Slapper (Islington): Islington branch had mandated its delegates to vote for the inclusion of the 4 Items from Glasgow but against the inclusion of the 4 draft floor resolutions.

H. Moss (Swansea): this would be logical as floor resolutions were not supposed to be pre-prepared but to arise out of the discussion.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow) explained the late arrival of their items by the fact that, for some reason, the letter containing the Call for Items had not arrived.

P. Hart (SW London) and E. Goodman (W London) moved that the 4 Glasgow Items (Discipline inside the Socialist Party; In What circumstances can members publicly express views contrary to that of the Party?; Does the Party case need revision?; The Socialist Party's attitude towards the Anarchist movement) be included in the agenda. Carried by 25 votes for, none against.

G. Slapper (Chair) proposed to take the first two Glasgow Items under A (Organisation and Internal Matters) and the second two under E (Policy, Principles and Theory). This was agreed.

4. PERMISSION FOR DELEGATES TO SIT

P. Hope (General Secretary) reported, in accordance with Rule 8, that no Form C had been received from Seaham branch while those from Dundee and Manchester had only just arrived, late. Manchester also explained that they had not had time to call a meeting to mandate delegates.

It was agreed that the delegates from Dundee be allowed to sit.

5. CHARGE AGAINST A MEMBER

P. Deutz (EC Member) introducing the charge on behalf of the EC, said that the basis of membership of the Party was agreement with the Declaration of Principles. It was the EC's view that Comrade P. Wilson had demonstrated his disagreement with the Party's principles by voting for the SDP in the 1987 General Election. On learning of this the EC had asked Comrade Wilson for an explanation. He had replied that he had done so because at the time he had felt that there was a chance that the Alliance might hold the balance of power in Parliament and insist on the bringing in of proportional representation which would benefit the Party; he had felt that this possibility justified abandoning the Party's traditional policy of writing "Socialism -- SPGB" across the ballot paper and had not realised at the time that this was an infringement of Rule 5 ("A member shall not belong to any other political organisation or write or speak for any political party except in opposition, or otherwise assist any other political party"). Comrade Wilson had gone on to say that he now admitted that he had infringed this Rule. In view of this reply the EC wrote to him a second time. In his second reply Comrade Wilson again accepted that he had breached Rule 5, adding that he also accepted that "any repetition of, or any intention to repeat, this action would be a matter for resignation". The EC considered this reply unsatisfactory as Comrade Wilson was merely admitting to a technical breach of a Party Rule rather than to the action itself being against the Party's principles which clearly excluded voting for any capitalist political party. In the EC's view, in refusing to acknowledge this Comrade Wilson had indicated disagreement with the Party's principles and so decided to proceed with the charge.

P. Wilson, in reply to the EC charge, said that if the question was only that of voting for the SDP the defendant had pleaded guilty and on his own admission he had indeed infringed Rule 5. But there was a wider issue involved: how the Party should deal with deviants. He had told 4 or 5 members that he had voted for the SDP yet only one had reported the matter to his branch. What was the position of the others? Were they guilty of condoning a breach of Rule 5? There were other members too who didn't apply the policy of writing "Socialism -- SPGB" across their ballot paper, either by not voting at all or even by voting for or against a proposition in some of the referendums that had been held in recent years. What was their position? And what was the position of those who said they would vote against a proposal to establish a nuclear waste dump in their neighbourhood? Or of women members who might feel that the Party had been wrong not to have supported the extension of the franchise to women at the time of the suffragettes? Clearly there always had been room for deviance in the Party, yet some members felt that the Party's Declaration of Principles were incontrovertible and represented the Absolute Truth that could not be changed even in the light of experience. In this case the Party was holding that all that was to be learned from experience had been learned by about the time the Party had been formed and that nothing could be learned from it since. He was disturbed by this attitude and felt uncomfortable with it. The Party must be open-minded and open to fresh thinking and new initiatives. He agreed with the EC Member who had said that the Declaration of Principles was more in the nature of poetry, a sort of myth that was a source of inspiration. He himself did not accept a literal interpretation of the words "as in the order of social evolution" in Clause 4 which suggested a pre-ordained course of social evolution leading inevitably to socialism. Nor did he accept a literal, blanket application of the term "hostile" in Clause 7 implying that the Party should be hostile to all initiatives under capitalism. The Party's principles should be under constant review and re-assessment. In conclusion Comrade Wilson said that he did not intend to repeat his action; this was in fact why he had not resigned.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): Comrade Wilson had expressed a view held not only by himself but by other members too: that we should be continually re-assessing and reviewing our principles and should be experimental and open-minded. He disagreed with this and with Comrade Wilson's view that the Declaration of Principles was just poetry; it was a revolutionary declaration expressing hostility to other views. Some members took the Party's lack of success to mean that there was something wrong with the Party and its principles. If they felt this way then they should propose resolutions amending the Party's policy and principles and should not indulge in other activities unless and until those policies and principles were amended. Membership of the Party was based on agreement with the Declaration of Principles; if Comrade Wilson didn't agree with them he should leave. He should not be allowed to resign when he next felt the need to vote for a capitalist party; he was guilty as charged and should be expelled now.

H. Moss (Swansea): Swansea branch had been surprised that the EC had decided to call a Party Poll on Comrade Wilson's action. Comrade Wilson had said that he had made a mistake and that he wouldn't do it again. That should have been the end of the matter. Comrade Deutz's charge was based on conclusions the EC had drawn, not from what Comrade Wilson had said but from what he had not said. This amounted to a demand for thought-control but members had never been punished for having doubts. All members must have had doubts at some time and many members had made mistakes. He himself had once signed a petition against student oppression in Iraq, which he soon realised to have been a mistake. Another branch member had voted "yes" in the 1974 referendum on joining the Common Market on the grounds that by breaking down national barriers this would provide a better framework for the spread of socialist ideas. He later freely admitted to having made a mistake but was not disciplined for it. We were not an authoritarian organisation with a mind police. His branch said "no" to the proposal to expel Comrade Wilson.

S. Coleman (Islington): Islington branch had mandated its delegates to vote for expulsion. It was not true that people who took up this position were people without doubts and unopen to reason and experience. P. Wilson had voted for the SDP and its policy of nuclear bombs and tinkering with the electoral system to try to increase its own representation in the House of Commons. Members could always have doubts and there could be no place for a socialist party for dogmatists but neither could there be a place for people who voted for parties out to run capitalism.

C. McColl (Bournemouth): the Party risked ridiculising itself since nobody had challenged the fact that if Comrade Wilson had resigned straightaway he could have rejoined later after a reasonable lapse of time. So why bother to expel him if he would have been accepted back anyway?

R. Cook (Birmingham): the incident under discussion reminded him of what had happened soon after he had joined the Party. He had expressed some dubious views but had not been charged; he had been taken aside and put straight in a discussion with other members. This is what should have happened in Comrade Wilson's case.

H. Cottis (E London) said he had had personal discussions with Comrade Wilson but had been unable to convince him.

C. Slapper and S. Coleman (Islington) moved the following motion for a formal resolution:

"That the forthcoming Party Poll regarding the charge against Comrade Pat Wilson now be organised using the following wording:
'That Comrade Pat Wilson be expelled from membership of the Socialist Party'".

C. Slapper, opening, said that, according to Rule 33, the matter had to go to a Party Poll. What the Delegate Meeting had to do was to formulate the wording.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow) disagreed, saying that the Rule required the Delegate Meeting to make a recommendation one way or the other.

S. Coleman (Islington): this had not happened on all previous occasions.

P. Bennett (Standing Orders Committee): if there was to be no recommendation then why the discussion.

After further discussion in which Comrades P. Lawrence (SW London) and E. Goodman (W London) supported the view expressed by Comrade Donnelly, the Islington delegates withdrew their motion.

P. Lawrence and P. Hart (SW London) then moved:

"That regarding the charge brought against Comrade P. Wilson in respect of him voting for the Social Democratic Party in the 1987 General Election, and that in view of his failure to repudiate this action and his contention that the principles are not binding on all members, he be expelled from the Party".

P. Lawrence, opening, said that he had hoped to hear an unequivocal pledge from Comrade Wilson that he had made a political mistake and wouldn't do it again. He hadn't heard this. Instead, Comrade Wilson had sought to justify his action and had couched this in terms of a criticism of the Party. This was regrettable but it was now an open and shut case. In view of Comrade Wilson's reply, delegates must vote for his expulsion; if they didn't a precedent would be set of allowing members to vote for a capitalist party.

H. Moss (Swansea): Comrade Lawrence had not represented accurately what Comrade Wilson had said. Comrade Wilson had clearly stated that he wouldn't do it again. He had committed an error but did it really warrant expulsion? Is this the way we would treat those who made mistakes in a socialist society? He suggested not; in which case, on the principle that the socialist party should reflect the society it was trying to establish, some other penalty than expulsion, or ostracism, should be applied.

J. Krause (Camden): even if things would be different in future socialist society, the fact remained that Comrade Wilson had not really repudiated his action. So he would be supporting the SW London motion.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): Comrade Wilson had said he had made a mistake but had added that if he felt like committing it again he would resign. This wasn't good enough. If we allowed people who disagreed with the hostility clause and vote for the SDP to stay in the Party, the Party would lose its revolutionary impetus.

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C. Slapper (Islington): some members seemed to think that the present proceedings against Comrade Wilson were unfair but this was not the case. Up to now, he had only admitted to breaking a Party Rule. But the charge concerned disagreement with a principle of the Party not a mere breach of rule. To acquit him, delegates would have to be convinced that he had changed the political view that had led him to break the rule. This he had not done; all he had recognised was that he happened to have broken a rule but not the principle that a Party member should not vote for a capitalist political party. Under these circumstances the charge wasn't unfair.

E. Goodman (W London): principles could be changed but only democratically; until they are changed their present form remains the basis of membership of the Party and members couldn't break them with impunity. Pat Wilson had broken them by comprising with the enemy to try to get a small concession; if he couldn't abide by the principles he should leave.

J. Percy-Smith (Yorkshire): Comrade Wilson no longer defended his action and had said that it was a mistake and that he wouldn't do it again. He was not a supporter of the SDP and had only voted for them with a view to furthering the socialist cause. She had been one of those who had known he had voted for the SDP but had taken no action as she couldn't see that, in the circumstances, he had harmed the Party.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): Comrade Wilson's action was the worst act of betrayal by a member he had known in his 25 years in the Party. He could have understood if Comrade Wilson had been a new, young member, but he had been the Party Treasurer and had chaired this year's Conference. If he was not expelled the Party's whole credibility would go. Comrade Vanni refused to believe that Comrade Wilson had not known that it was breaking Rule 5 to vote for a capitalist party. He was for expulsion.

B. Johnson (Swansea) also refused to believe that Comrade Wilson had made a mistake. He had been Party Treasurer for a number of years --and a very good one too-- and had been active in at least 4 election campaigns, so he must have known that socialists don't vote for the opposition. His act had therefore not been a mistake, but must have been a deliberate, conscious one.

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey): his branch had not mandated him to vote for expulsion but he had been hoping for a less equivocal response from Comrade Wilson. This had not come, so the Party must now decide on whether or not to expel him.

C. McColl (Bournemouth): it was irrelevant how long Comrade Wilson had been a member and what posts he had occupied in the Party. All members were equal and to make allowances for a younger member but not for an older one smacked of elitism.

R. Cook (Birmingham): the facts were clear --Comrade Wilson had voted for the SDP, which was a serious offence-- but two questions remained: Did he repudiate this action? And, Did he in fact think, as the motion under discussion stated, that the Party's principles were not binding on all members? Could he be asked to clarify these two points?

C. McEwan (Glasgow): Comrade Wilson had not repudiated his action and had gone on to criticise the Declaration of Principles. These were a statement of revolutionary, scientific socialism not poetry. Comrade Wilson's view of the principles was not a scientific one but was like that of those religious people who rejected a literal interpretation of the bible in favour of it being allegorical. It was clear that Comrade Wilson was putting up a fight because other members held the same views. He should be expelled as a warning to these other members.

S. Coleman (Islington): Comrade Wilson should be asked two questions. Was the Socialist Party the only party that stood for the interests of the working class? And, Are there any occasions when voting for a party that seeks to run capitalism can assist the aims of the Socialist Party? If he disagreed with these two propositions he did not agree with the Party and should not be in it.

D. Davies (NW London) said she was concerned that some other members had not considered Comrade Wilson's action to be detrimental to the Party.

J. Howell (non-delegate): he was another that had known that Comrade Wilson had voted for the SDP but Comrade Wilson had said that he had no intention of doing this again. He was being blamed for showing no remorse and

refusing to never change his mind in the future. But was there any member prepared to give such a pledge?

P. Stuart (Dundee), speaking as a new member, said he had joined on the basis of the Party's principles, which included not voting for any other party.

K. Graham (Bristol), replying to Comrade Davies, said everyone agreed that it had been an utterly stupid act on the part of Comrade Wilson to vote for the SDP, but the question was: was it, in the circumstances, an expulsion matter? He was amongst those who thought it wasn't.

D. Chesham (EC Member) said he too did not consider it had been detrimental. The meeting was turning into a Stalinist conclave. There was no evidence for the offence other than the accused's own admission; nor was there any evidence that the SDP had actually been "assisted" by the action in question, as required by Rule 5. Both these points would result in acquittal in a capitalist Court of Law. If Comrade Wilson were to be expelled, Rule 33 would be being used as a means of retribution. He would be being punished for being naive, naive in voting for the SDP and naive in telling other members that he had done so. He would be expelled for being open and honest, for having been over-optimistic, for not having applied the sterile police of writing "Socialism -- SPGB" across his ballot paper. Comrade Chesham said some members had forgotten the distinction between reforms and reformism; the Party was opposed to reformism but not necessarily to all reforms; it was the Party's official policy that a minority of socialist delegates in Parliament might vote for measures proposed by other parties. So, socialists could vote with, if not for other parties. Proportional representation, as an extension of political democracy, was precisely one such measure that a minority of socialist MPs might vote for, as Comrade Wilson had done. If our Party didn't mirror future society by showing compassion and tolerance for someone who had made a mistake, it would be a Stalinist party rather than a socialist party.

S. Coleman (Islington): although the Party could conceive of circumstances in which socialists might vote for some capitalist measure it could conceive of no circumstances under which they could vote for a capitalist party.

P. Wilson, in his final speech, said that the Socialist Party was, by definition, the only socialist party in Britain, but this did not rule out political initiatives arising in other parts of the world which might not call themselves socialist but which would nevertheless adhere to the same basic ideas. Such a group could even arise in Britain, as "The World of Free Access" group had shown. So we weren't opposed to all other political initiatives on principle. As Comrade Chesham had said, there were some measures which on balance, under the circumstances, etc the Party could support and these would include extensions of the democratic constitution involving universal suffrage, votes for women, trade union rights, etc, which was needed to further our aim. In conclusion, Comrade Wilson said he had been mistaken to have tried to extend democratic rights by voting for the SDP and that he wouldn't make this mistake again.

P. Lawrence (SW London), winding up on the motion, said that what was involved was not a slight disagreement or doubt but the important principle of not supporting capitalist parties by voting for them. He would leave delegates to judge whether or not Comrade Wilson in his statements today had refuted the charge that he had not simply made a mistake but that he disagreed with the Party's principles.

The Floor Resolution was carried by 21 votes to 8, with 2 abstentions.

Saturday afternoon

6. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A. ORGANISATION AND INTERNAL MATTERS

4. Should the EC continue to have the right, as it has at present under Rule 33, to bring a charge against a member, suspend that member and institute a Party Poll on his/her membership? Should the EC not first make all the information available to branches and then wait for a motion to be called by a Delegate Meeting, Conference or six or more branches as per Rule 26?

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H. Moss (Swansea), opening, said his branch had always been unhappy about Rule 33. The EC's job was to run the day-to-day affairs of the Party and was an inadequate body to bring a charge against a member. It was also dangerous that a small number of EC Members should have this power. Swansea's alternative was that if the EC felt that a member should be charged, they should circulate the evidence to all branches and let them decide whether or not to call a poll as under Rule 26 (at the request of 6 branches). The branch was also concerned that the EC had the power to suspend a member for a period of up to 5 or 6 months until the matter was decided by Party Poll. Suspension might be appropriate in some cases but why should it be automatic in all cases?

E. Goodman (W London): the EC should continue to be the body to decide on bringing charges, but some discretion might be allowed over suspension. V. Vanni (Glasgow) wondered whether this was not an attempt to make it impossible for the Party to ever bring a charge. In any event charges were very rare and the existing procedure was very rigorous with plenty of safeguards.

C. Slapper (Islington): a Party Poll was a democratic procedure and there was no harm in the EC having the power to call one because it was the membership and not the EC that finally decided on expulsion. The EC should not be given discretion as to whether or not to suspend a charged member; automatic suspension was fairer.

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey): suspension gave the charged member the opportunity to concentrate on preparing his or her defence.

C. Skelton (non-delegate) was in favour of the EC being allowed some latitude to decide whether or not to suspend a charged member.

P. Hart (SW London): against any change in the Rule.

P. Deutz (EC Member): the EC had once circulated branches to ask whether or not it should charge a member and had got a no answer.

H. Moss (Swansea), replying to the discussion, said he was not worried that the proposed changes might make it harder to expel a member.

1. The Socialist Party is an open, democratic organisation; membership is based upon acceptance of our Object and Declaration of Principles. Is there any contradiction here?
2. Internal Discussion and Outside Propaganda: Where to Draw the Line.
3. The Position of Guildford Branch.
- 3a Discipline Inside the Socialist Party.
- 3b In What Circumstances can Members publicly express views contrary to that of the Party?

P. Deutz (EC Member) was given permission by the Meeting to introduce Item 1 on behalf of E London branch. She said that the Party was not a loose federation nor a libertarian association, but a political party with a democratically-decided policy binding on all members. Admission to the Party was on the basis of acceptance of the Declaration of Principles. Those members who had come to disagree with this Declaration were free to put their views outside the Party but not in it.

E. Goodman (W London), in opening on Item 2, referred delegates to the branch's circular on the subject which argued that members who disagreed with a particular Party policy or who wanted to change it had the full democratic right to express their views within the Party with a view to trying to win over other members, but they were not entitled to propagate their views to non-members in competition with the democratically-decided majority Party position.

P. Lawrence (SW London), opening up on Item 3, said the views of the ex-Guildford branch were incompatible with membership of the Party for three main reasons: (i) those who held these views did not stand for the organisation for socialism in the immediate future; instead, they favoured the formation and spread of workers' cooperatives with the Party acting as a clearing house for this. These workers' cooperatives would have to operate under capitalism and participate in the process of buying and selling. To encourage the growth of such capitalistic enterprises was both hostile to and the opposite of organisation for socialism; (ii) They did

not accept that socialism could only be established when a majority wanted and understood it; they rejected this as being based on "abstract propaganda" and favoured developing within capitalism the material basis of socialism, i.e. the actual establishment of socialism, in stages in which the superiority of socialism could be demonstrated practically to those still working in the non-socialist sector; (iii) They did not accept the need for a socialist majority to democratically win control of political power before socialism could be established but envisaged changes in economic relationships taking place prior to the formal enactment of socialism. They advocated the establishment of socialism through the invasion of "socialistic relationships" within capitalism and prior to the capture of political power, reducing the latter to what they described as a mere "mopping up" operation. In other words, those who accepted "The Road to Socialism" circular saw the establishment of socialism as taking place outside of the political arena. Such views were completely incompatible with membership of the Party and wholly opposed to our principles. V. Vanni (Glasgow), opening on Item 3a, said that a dangerous view was circulating in the Party that there should be little or no discipline at all within the SPGB: if some member expressed a view contrary to the principles, that was democracy; if some member voted for the SDP, so what; members can say and do what they like, even against the Party's rules and principles, without any action being taken against them. This Anything Goes attitude was a denial of democracy as it led to different members saying different things and to there being no consistency in our propaganda. Glasgow had some sympathy with Camden branch when they spoke of "anarchist tendencies in the Party".

D. Donnelly (Glasgow), opening on Item 3b, said that the words "authoritarian", "libertarian", "dogmatic" and even "Stalinist" were being bandied about, but we must assume that members were none of these. The Party had always thrived on debate, e.g. over the nature of the ruling class in state capitalist Russia. When this was last debated, he had been against the view that was finally adopted, but he had always agreed to put over the majority view when speaking for the Party, expressing his own view only within the Party. There had been a similar debate on the nature of the State. So there was room within the Party case for wide discussion, but the question was in what circumstances could a member holding minority views express them publicly. Could he himself, for instance, produce a book saying that the political bureaucracy was not the capitalist class in Russia? There was free discussion within the Party but, if we are to behave like a revolutionary party, the Party must eventually arrive at a common position binding on all members. As to Guildford, their views about cooperatives were quite wrong, but they had raised a valid point about what would happen when socialists had become a minority of millions. But they had gone on to lay down a utopian blueprint that was absolutely opposed to the Party's theory of revolution.

S. Coleman (Islington): Islington supported the W London circular 100%. There was a tension between the nature of our party as an open democratic one and courtesy in internal discussions, i.e. if you want to advance a view different from the majority position you raise it with the majority first. As to Guildford branch, the general rule was that if you want to change Party policy you put down resolutions which could be democratically discussed and voted on at Conference. Guildford should have proposed a resolution to abandon our traditional position in favour of us financially promoting cooperatives under capitalism; this proposal could then have been properly considered and voted on. But they hadn't done this and when other comrades had replied to these views, instead of engaging in proper discussion they had shouted "we didn't say that", "we didn't mean this", "gross misrepresentation". Comrade Vanni had overstated the case against the sort of democratic immaturity illustrated by Guildford branch with his references to "current trends", "dangerous views" and "anarchist tendencies". Comrade Chesham too was quite out of order in calling other members "Stalinist". It was true, however, that dogmatism was a danger. Dogmatism meant attaching more importance to words than to their meaning.

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Dogmatism was not recognising that the Party could and had changed its views. In his view, Guildford's position was more psychological than political; they had become disaffected and disloyal to the Party and had sought to dress up their disillusion as a revision of socialist ideas.

G. Slapper (Chair) reminded delegates of the terms of article 15 of Conference and Delegate Meeting Standing Orders that "no member shall question the socialist integrity, honesty or motives of any other member".

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey): this article applied to persons, not ideas.

R. Cook (Birmingham): a reply to the 1988 Conference floor resolution regretting that Guildford branch had given permission to a journal to publish their circular had just been handed out. It was signed by 9 people, only one of whom was present. This was typical of Guildford's attitude from the start: they don't discuss; they just fire a shot and then disappear.

D. Devine (Dundee): members joined the Party because of their experience of capitalism. It had been said that there were no leaders in the Party, but this was not true from what had been said this morning when Glasgow had spoken of "dangerous views" circulating in the Party and had implied that there were unsound and sound members, i.e. members who could be trusted and members who couldn't. Dundee branch was concerned about the trend in the Party towards charges and expulsions.

P. Lawrence and P. Hart (SW London) moved:

"That the members who still adhere to the general views expressed in the Guildford document 'The Road to Socialism' hold views which are incompatible with membership of the Party, and this ADM recommends that they be asked to reaffirm the Party's argument that Socialism can only be established by the democratic actions of a socialist majority following the capture of political control".

H. Moss (Swansea): there were two kinds of member who did the Party no service. First, there were those who saw the Party as a hobby or a game and came to Delegate Meetings with pre-packaged resolutions -----

P. Lawrence (SW London) raised a point of order: it was deeply offensive to have the psychology of members impugned in this way.

G. Slapper (Chair) ruled that Comrade Moss's approach was out of order under article 15 of Standing Orders.

H. Moss: some members had a hopelessly unrealistic view of the significance of the Party. They were living in a fantasy world when they implied that matters raised within the Party could cause us discredit if they got outside. The opposite was true. It was in our interest to have contacts in the outside world. Guildford may have been discourteous in allowing a non-party journal to have their document before it had been discussed at Conference, but at least their document had sparked off a discussion in the columns of that journal helping us to get our ideas disseminated more widely.

E. Goodman (W London) said she didn't mind people outside the Party knowing that we had discussions inside the Party, but she did object to members who disagreed with the Party's policy having access to our official journal to express their views, as one Guildford member was now demanding.

K. Graham (Bristol) criticised Guildford members for circulating a statement, and not for the first time, at the last moment, so depriving branches of the possibility of discussing it and mandating their delegates. His branch had two reservations with regard to the West London circular. First, a distinction should be made between what members could say to outsiders as individuals and what they could say when representing the Party. Second, a distinction should be drawn between basic and non-basic Party views, between the Party's principles and what happened to be the Party position at any one time on a particular issue, e.g. on trade unions, Solidarity in Poland, the State, where disagreement was legitimate. It should be possible for a member to say in public "This is the current Party position, though I happen not to agree with it". This could even be good for our propaganda.

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey): Guildford's disagreement clearly came into the basic rather than non-basic category; they were criticising the Party's basic position not just its current views. They were in fact on a completely different branch of the tree of anti-capitalist movements than the Party:

the anarcho-communist branch. Their whole approach was therefore quite different to ours. With regard to the West London circular, Enfield and Haringey felt that members should also have the right to criticise the work of the EC in public, to, for instance, tell a journalist who asked why they disagreed with some EC decision. Members should be able to express any views in public as long as these were not detrimental to the Declaration of Principles.

J. Krause (Camden): Guildford had taken up a position contrary to the Declaration of Principles, so we must oppose them. It can't do us any good for members not to state the Party case. Democracy was not doing anything you wanted, but doing what the majority decided.

J. Howell (non-delegate): Guildford had been accused of being undemocratic for allowing their minority view to be published in a non-party journal, but democracy was not just about the will of the majority, it was also about a maximum of participation in decision-making. Withholding information was undemocratic and Guildford had not harmed the Party in doing what they had done. On the contrary, it had brought favourable publicity to the Party as the editor of the journal had remarked that the Party was more democratic than some other parties he knew. Even the Communist Party was allowing public discussion and disagreement amongst its members on its new policy document. Guildford's purpose in agreeing to publication was not to make propaganda for their views but to invite dialogue with those interested; it would be undemocratic not to admit such people to our discussions. Guildford had not attacked anything essential to the Party case in their circular. They had not said that economic laws could be changed at will; that would mean that there would be no such laws at all. But such laws were not totally immutable either. If economic laws had been immutable then capitalist relations could not have developed within feudalism. The economic laws of capitalism depended for their operation on a wide acceptance of capitalist ideology and so could be changed with the growth of socialist ideology. This was not reformism as reformists only exerted pressure on the superstructure whereas Guildford envisaged socialist ideology exerting pressure, and shifting things, on the capitalist base, on the mode of production. Comrade Howell ended by quoting from a statement criticising the Party for being sectarian and failing to take into account change in capitalism, written in 1972 by ...a certain P. Lawrence.

C. Slapper (Islington): There was a procedure for changing Party policy. At any one time there will be a majority Party position; the minority can circulate views critical of this majority position and put down resolutions to get it changed. If they are successful, then their views become the Party position. What they can't do is jump the gun and express their views outside as if they were the Party's position. Guildford had repudiated the Party's theory of revolution on the very first page of their circular, and this had harmed the Party. They had also misunderstood the Party's position: it was not our view that changes can't take place under capitalism but that capitalism's laws were oppressive, pervasive and universal and so couldn't be nibbled away gradually but only ended at once. In arguing that as capitalism had gradually developed within feudalism, so why couldn't socialism develop within capitalism, Comrade Howell had overlooked the unique character of the socialist revolution: it would be, for the first time in history, a majority revolution carried out by a conscious majority in its own interest. There would be a gradual build-up of the numbers of socialists and when there was a majority the change would be made.

P. Lawrence (SW London), winding up on the motion, said he didn't agree with that part of the West London circular which allowed members to hold views critical of the Party as long as they didn't express them in public. It still had to be decided whether or not the views in question were compatible with membership of the Party. If they were not, then they could not be expressed within the Party either. Guildford's views fell into that category.

The SW London Floor Resolution was carried by 21 votes to 2, with abstentions.

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B. PARTY LITERATURE

5. How can the Party make the best use of its printing press?
6. The Conflict between "topical" and "theoretical" articles in the Socialist Standard: Do we have the balance right?
7. Should the headline wording on the cover of the Socialist Standard be politically more provocative and challenging rather than just descriptive?
8. Should there be an attempt in future to reduce the selling price of the Socialist Standard in order to target a wider market (even if this involved changes in length or appearance)?
9. Should the Party produce a pamphlet on Human Nature?

C. Begley (Islington), opening on Item 5, said that some time next week the Big Day would arrive when the SS would be printed for the first time by ourselves at Head Office. This would give us control over our own literature and reduce the price of producing the SS from £1700 to £1000 a month. The actual typesetting, which made up most of this cost, would continue to be done outside but in time this too could be done partly at Head Office by using the Party's computer.

S. Coleman (Islington), opening on Item 6, said that a conclusion on this matter was not going to be reached that day. Some members felt that the SS was too heavy for those we wanted to read it, even if it wasn't for those who actually read it. Other members felt it was often too lightweight. Our dilemma was how to combine a popular, tabloid approach without missing out on theory. Today the balance was about right. A theoretical article, he added, was not an article that people couldn't understand but an article explaining some part of our theory, which could be done in simple terms.

C. Slapper (Islington), opening on Item 7, gave some examples, taken from the branch's circular on the subject, as to how the wording on the front cover of the SS could have been politically more provocative: "Education --new realism in the schools" (Nov 1987) could have been "Schools --Who Needs Them?", "Less Weapons...or More?" (Jan 1988) could have been "How To End War", and "Racism --Race and Class" (June 1988) could have been "Exposed: The Stupidity of Racism". Moving on to open on Item 8, he said that printing the Standard ourselves meant that we could experiment, if we wanted to, with less pages, lower prices, etc.

S. Dowsett (Islington) opening on Item 9, said that the human nature argument was essential to our political theory; this being so, why was there no Party pamphlet on the subject? Such a pamphlet would need careful preparation and would have to cover such subjects as: Is there such a thing as human nature? Where does human nature end and human behaviour begin? Indeed, can such a distinction be drawn? Members sometimes used different arguments: some said simply that human nature was no barrier to socialism while others said that it was such that it actually made socialism possible. Such matters would have to be cleared up before a pamphlet could be published. Islington suggested that the same procedure be adopted as had been over the Production for Use pamphlet, namely, the setting up of a committee to collect and set out the material.

D. Davies (NW London): the Print Committee had printed some material for her branch but was only charging for the paper, which meant it was charging only a quarter of what an outside printer would. This was all very well, but the branch felt that this was too little in view of the Party's current financial position and the other charges involved (ink, electricity, etc).

E. Goodman (W London) drew attention to a discrepancy between the figures given as to the cost of acquiring the printing equipment as given in the Print Committee's report and as given in EC Reports.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): it can't have been the intention that the summary of the party case that appeared on the inside front cover of the Standard should always be the same. There should be a series of such texts that could be rotated.

R. Cook (Birmingham): the acquisition of our own printing equipment would

not only mean that we could produce our literature more cheaply. It would also give us more flexibility as over using a variety of type-faces. K. Graham (Bristol): two socialist journals, taking the two alternative approaches, existed in the British Isles: the Socialist Standard and Socialist View published by the Irish party. He also wanted to know if there were ever disputes over articles in the Editorial Committee and, if so, how they were settled.

P. Lawrence (SW London) agreed that there should be a pamphlet on human nature. He was against the use of different type-faces in the Standard. B. Johnson (Swansea): a pamphlet on human nature was not the only gap in our range of literature, but would such a pamphlet have a wide enough market?

C. McColl (Bournemouth) asked whether the Standard was produced for an intellectual minority or for the general public. The editors should be guided by those who sold the Standard as to its content and he could assure them that while it was easy enough to get someone to buy one copy it was very difficult to get them to buy a second because its content was too intellectual.

G. Slapper (Chair) said that the discussion on these Items would have to continue the next day.

The Delegate Meeting adjourned and resumed on Sunday, 16 October.

Sunday morning, 16 October

G. Slapper (Chair) said the discussion on the Items under Party Literature would be resumed in the afternoon.

C. PROPAGANDA AND PUBLICITY

10. The Thatcher Years --their effect on the propagation of Socialist Ideas.
11. What measures have been taken towards the implementation of the 1988 Conference resolution calling upon the EC to prepare for a National Party Strategy? What Needs to be Done?
12. What is an Open Forum and can they assist us in our propaganda?
13. Local Propaganda.
14. How far should we go in identifying the Party as The Socialist Party of Great Britain?

S. Coleman (Islington), opening on Item 10, said that the Thatcher Years had involved (i) the coming into office of an avowedly capitalist government that had attacked the health service, housing, trade union liberties and civil liberties generally. This had left both the working class and left wing parties in a mess. The Communist Party, for instance, now bore no resemblance to the party we had known: they now argue that the working class no longer exists; (ii) the celebration of the market and of buying and selling which had affected the Labour Party too. Kinnock had declared many times that nobody serious wanted to get rid of the market, which thus appeared as an inevitable feature of society; (iii) a colossal demoralisation of the working class, as evidenced by the growth of drug abuse, drunkenness and violence. The Party had failed to discuss this evolution and how capitalism had changed in recent years. These changes had even affected Party morale, being partly responsible for the present internal squabbling and attempts to revise the Party case. Islington suggested our answer should be: (i) to go for the radical void that existed at the moment by adopting an angry, hard-hitting, absolute militant class war approach; (ii) to campaign for "non-market socialism", emphasising that socialism meant precisely nothing less than the abolition of the market; (iii) to take steps to show that we alone have kept to Marxism. He believed that if we adopted this approach it should be possible to double our membership in a few years.

S. Coleman (Islington), opening on Item 11, said that Conference had voted for a national strategy and the Party's secretariat had drawn up a document on the procedures that could be adopted for doing this. This involved subcommittees putting plans and priorities to the EC, the EC then choosing priorities in the light of the Party's finances and Conference decisions and putting the final plan to Conference. Islington wholly endorsed this

approach which would mean that Conference could become an event where we not only reviewed past activity but where we planned future activity too. It should be possible to implement this change as from Conference 1990. P. Lawrence (SW London), opening on Item 13, referred delegates to the branch's circular on the subject which emphasised the need to study local problems and circumstances when contesting local elections. Turning to Item 10, he said that workers had got deeper and deeper into debt especially through mortgages to buy houses and this was bound to adversely affect trade union militancy. Militant Thatcherism certainly did represent a change compared with the 1950s and 1960s when profit had tended to be a dirty word; the defenders of capitalism were now on the offensive on the intellectual front. There were also attacks on the State and an emphasis on individuality. We should be able to get in on these themes as long as we avoided utopian-anarchist arguments.

H. Cottis (E London), opening on Item 14, said he suspected other members were embarrassed when on a recent television programme Comrade Slapper, in reply to a direct question from Sir Robin Day as to which party he represented, had had to reply "The Socialist Party", which left Day and no doubt many others perplexed, whereas if he had have replied "The Socialist Party of Great Britain" he would have been more widely understood and we would have had more publicity. His branch also sympathised with those who had opposed the elimination of "of Great Britain" from the platform at Hyde Park.

G. Wilson (NW London), opening on Item 12, said his branch was opposed to open forums as we must always speak in opposition to our opponents and not embrace them.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): the reason why meetings had been advertised as a "forum" was that other organisations would not accept the term "debate", but these meetings were debates nevertheless. Comrade Coleman had been indulging in a bit of Conference rhetoric. Was it really true that disaffected leftwingers were a rich vein for us? Comrade Donnelly did not think so. Our market was the whole working class, but if we had to concentrate on a particular segment he would prefer the 15-25 year old apoliticals some of whom we had been recruiting through our ads in the musical press.

R. Cook (Birmingham): the Tories had exploited a rejection of dependency culture, the view that "the State must do something for us". We could share this attitude as we too wanted people to help themselves, not be assisted from above. Workers under Thatcher had become more down-trodden; the mask of social-democratic, consensus capitalism had been dropped. This should help us.

E. Goodman (W London): one effect of the Thatcher years had been to introduce divisions into the working class, as in particular between those buying houses and the others. Housebuyers even thought that they were no longer members of the working class. As to a national Party strategy, she described the various Conference resolutions passed on this in recent years as typical pious resolutions: everybody voted for them saying "amen" without the intention of doing anything about them, as she had learned from her experience on the National Strategy Committee which had met complete indifference from branches.

C. Slapper (Islington): those who refused to implement this year's Conference resolution on the use of the Party's name were being undemocratic. On open forums, he said they could indeed help the Party. He pointed out that they were never held with political parties but only with individuals or with groups which, though political, were not parties. They involved our speaker and the invited speaker speaking in parallel rather than in direct opposition, but we were just as able to get our point of view across in such discussions as in confrontational debate.

V. Vanni (Glasgow) spoke of the effect of the Thatcher years on the morale of Party members. Morale in the Party was at an all-time low and some members had lost confidence in the Party case, as had happened before in the 1950s. There was less interest in politics now and he had been surprised at working class apathy in the face of mass unemployment and cuts in social benefits. Indoor meetings were unsuccessful, outdoor meetings were on their last legs, SS sales were dwindling.

K. Aubrey (Bristol): if you read Marxism Today and the New Statesman it was clear that they were re-assessing their views and coming closer and closer to Thatcherism by accepting the market. He was not sure, however, that more tub-thumping was the answer as this put off a lot of people. W. Preston (Eccles) said some members only seemed to be happy when they were miserable. As a socialist he was an optimist not a pessimist. Eccles branch was planning more activity: to bring out a journal and to contest elections. There were also optimistic signs amongst the working class too. Trade union militants were pig-sick with what was happening in the Labour Party and as a result the AEWU North-West Region had not been able to fill its full complement to the recent Labour Party Conference despite the promise of expenses-paid hotel accommodation at the seaside.

K. Knight (NW London): a national strategy was a dead duck. Open forums were unacceptable as they conflicted with the hostility clause even if they might be pleasanter affairs than debates.

C. McColl (Bournemouth) warned about talking too much about Thatcherism since we knew that capitalism without Thatcher would be no better. We should put the case for socialism in much simpler terms, as the Green Party had done with its case. They plugged away at the simple (even if mistaken) message that the environment was under threat because of "industrialism". We should get our simple message across in the same way that social problems were caused by capitalism.

P. Hart (SW London): there was room both for debates and for forums. These days the audience wanted to participate in the discussion and forums allowed this to happen.

C. McEwan (Glasgow): we should call ourselves "the SPGB" as this was the term by which we were immediately recognised.

R. Headicar (non-delegate) said he had had experience of forums from the other side: as a guest speaker before he had joined the Party a few weeks ago. He had never been hostile to the Party even if not in 100% agreement with it and couldn't think what he could have debated with the Party except some burning issue like "Is there a physical basis to consciousness?" Having said this it should not be imagined that forums were wishy-washy affairs. When he had spoken with Comrade Cook they had clashed on some points. As to Thatcherism, the vicious meanness of spirit it illustrated had helped him, for one, to see through capitalism.

S. Easton (EC Member): it wasn't our tenets that needed reviewing but our presentation of them. This was why he favoured the forum formula.

C. Skelton (non-delegate): Thatcherism had polarised the working class into rich and poor: those with jobs and houses and those in dire poverty. It had also encouraged selfish, individualist attitudes. Thatcher herself had gone on record as saying that society didn't exist and that only individuals and individual families did. She was trying to take class out of politics but the class struggle was not just workers fighting the capitalists; it was also the capitalists fighting the workers and here she had excelled. There should be opportunities for us here. Nor should it be forgotten that the Party grew when people reacted against the Macmillan "You've Never Had It So Good" years. The same would happen when people got fed up with Thatcher.

G. Woods (Central Branch secretary) emphasised the need for Party members to put in work centrally as this was essential to back up speakers all over the country. She also drew attention to the isolation of some members of Central branch which, she reminded delegates, comprised a third of our total membership.

At this point the Chair called on Comrade H. Moss as Party Funds Organiser to make a statement on the Party's finances.

H. Moss (Party Funds Organiser) said that as a result of the appeal for funds in the Standard and the letter and standing order form that had gone out to all members, £1500 had been raised as donations and an income of £900 a year guaranteed. This latter was only an interim figure as the appeal for standing orders had only just been launched. He urged branch

secretaries who had not already done so to send them out as the intention was to contact every member individually. Thanks to a recent legacy of £5000, the amount of money in our bank accounts on 10 October was £9000, which of course was only enough to keep us going for about six months. So more money and more savings on expenditure were still needed.

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey): the working class was differentiated and this conflicted with our ideas and values since in our view the working class should be united and our appeal was addressed to the whole working class. Unfortunately, however, financial and technical factors made it impossible for us to contact the whole working class. We had therefore to consider if there were any sections of the working class whose consciousness was higher than average and aim at them. One such group, he suggested, were those concerned about the environment.

K. Graham (Bristol): the appeal for funds and standing orders should be sent to sympathisers and ex-members as well as members. This was what Bristol branch had done.

C. McColl (Bournemouth): an attempt to contact Central Branch members in the South and South East had been made a few years ago but many of these members had objected to being contacted.

G. Woods (Central Branch Secretary) replied that she was concerned about new members who joined Central Branch via the Forms A Scrutiny Committee rather than long-standing members who had retired.

S. Coleman (Islington), replying to the debate on Items 10 and 11, said that Conference resolutions on national strategy must be implemented and must not be regarded as being simply pious. Otherwise the Party would become a loose federation with the consequence that some members now active centrally would withdraw from central activity. The debate on the Thatcher Years had been good. For once, at a conference of our political party, we had discussed politics! He was sceptical about the Greens being a useful target for us; to him they appeared to be the last ideological defence of capitalism. He was also sceptical about targetting apoliticals. It was clear that most of our members entered from Stage Left rather than Stage Right and it was here that we should concentrate our efforts. But he could be wrong and it was precisely for this reason that we needed a debate each Conference on our strategy.

G. Wilson (NW London) replied to the debate on Item 12. He added that Thatcherism didn't mean a thing. It was the system that must be got rid of not the person.

P. Lawrence (SW London), replying to the debate on Item 13, noted that the response to the branch circular on local elections had been supportive if somewhat muted.

H. Cottis (E London), replying to the debate on Item 14, said his branch was still in favour of the wider use of the Party's full title.

Sunday afternoon

The debate on Party Literature was resumed.

C. Slapper and S. Coleman (Islington) moved the following floor resolution arising from Item 9:

"ADM recommends the EC to set up a Committee to investigate material on 'Human Nature' with a view to the eventual production of a pamphlet on the subject".

S. Dowsett (Print Committee) replied to Comrade Goodman on the discrepancy between the figures for the cost of the printing equipment. This was due to the EC figures including VAT which the Print Committee had forgotten to add. He went on to say that if the Party's computer was used typesetting costs could be cut from £700-£750 a month to under £100. The problem was to find someone to type 20,000 words each month.

E. Goodman (W London): the branch was against a pamphlet on Human Nature but favoured a leaflet.

G. Wilson (NW London): we don't need another pamphlet: we can't sell the existing ones.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): the decision as to whether to produce a pamphlet should be left to Conference.

P. Lawrence (SW London), K. Graham (Bristol), K. Knight (W London) and

C. Skelton (non-delegate) spoke in favour of a pamphlet on human nature. H. Walters (Islington): we needed to get our ideas clear before we published any pamphlet and this was why the branch wanted a Committee to be set up first as had happened over the Production for Use pamphlet. We don't really have a proper theory of human nature as we do for instance on economics. But we need one. Some members state --and it has even appeared in the Socialist Standard-- that "there's no such thing as human nature", which is absurd. Again, when in a debate an opponent says that socialism wouldn't work because "it's against human nature" speakers often reply by citing examples of considerate and caring human behaviour, but this merely reduces the issue to a moralistic debate opposing good human behaviour and bad human behaviour. This wasn't good enough and was why we needed more discussion so as to develop a proper, scientific theory of human nature. H. Young (NW London) said there was a need to refute the theories not only of the old Social Darwinists but also of the new so-called Social Biologists like Desmond Morris, the Naked Ape, and Robert Ardrey, the failed playwright, who were peddling unscientific ideas about humans being inherently aggressive, possessive, etc. There were also the Creationists in America whose views Reagan had put on a par with those of the Evolutionists. S. Dowsett (Islington), winding up on the motion, reminded delegates that it was not seeking the immediate publication of the pamphlet, but merely the setting up of a committee to prepare material for it.

The Floor Resolution was carried by 17 votes to 10.

D. ELECTORAL ACTIVITY

15. Election Manifestoes -- A Party Matter?

16. The production and content of the Swansea Branch local election literature.

17. The use of candidates' photographs on branch election manifestos.

H. Cottis (E London), opening on Item 15, said that his branch felt that election manifestos, local as well as national, were a Party and not a branch affair and should be vetted by the EC as a body responsible to the Party as a whole.

P. Lawrence (SW London) asked, before opening on Item 16, if the situation regarding the drawing up and approval of the manifesto for the Swansea local election last May could be clarified. Who had drawn it up and who had approved it?

H. Moss (Swansea), in reply, reminded delegates that an attempt to treat election manifestos as different from leaflets generally had been defeated at 1987 ADM. So the manifesto had been dealt with as any branch leaflet would have been, namely, drafted and approved by the branch, sent to the New Pamphlets Committee for editing and approval, and then on to the Print Committee for printing. This procedure had been followed in the case in point.

P. Lawrence (SW London) said the manifesto carried a photo of the candidate and the appeal "Vote for Howard Moss Socialist Party of Great Britain candidate". This was clearly an appeal for a personal vote and was the first time this had ever happened in the Party's history; it was clearly against our principle that the emancipation of the working class had to be the work of the working class itself. In addition, the content of the manifesto was very, very confused. Our aim was defined as a "rationally organised, truly human kind of society" and as "a new system of ownership where each person owns everything and takes freely according to their needs", which was typical of the vagueness of the whole document. The basic class relationship between owners and non-owners was not mentioned; instead there was a reference that "a small minority of people own an enormous amount and a large majority own very little or nothing". This suggested that the solution might lie in the redistribution of wealth on a fairer basis and was reminiscent of Labour Party manifestos of the 1940s. If members wanted to change our propaganda and give it another emphasis they should come to Conference to get approval for this and not try to lift the emphasis by the back door, as Swansea had done in this case, from a class to a moral and ethical appeal.

H. Moss (Swansea), opening on Item 17, reminded delegates that the issue of

photos had been discussed at Conference and a floor resolution leaving the decision up to branches had been carried. The branch had made a decision to put the candidate's photo on the manifesto. In the past, photos had even been refused for the press, but this refusal had long since been abandoned. There had even been opposition to photos in the Standard but this too had been dropped. The reason was a recognition that an accompanying photo made a text less forbidding and more likely to be read. It was this same consideration that had led Swansea to take the decision it did: to get more people to read the manifesto while at the same time adding a human touch to show that the manifesto had been issued by ordinary human beings rather than some anonymous party machine. So it was not an appeal for a personal vote, merely an attempt to get more people to read the manifesto. In any event, no personal details of the candidate were given and Swansea would be quite opposed to this. Nor were they arguing that the candidate's photo should always appear; this decision should be left to branches as Conference had recommended. Moving on to reply to SW London's criticism of the content of this year's Swansea manifesto, he said it was destructive criticism of the worse kind. But for a mistake the text would have appeared in the Socialist Standard and all members would have been able to judge for themselves. He agreed that it was not the same as the previous Swansea manifesto, but the branch had wanted to experiment by trying a different approach. SW London's objections were spurious and when they were first raised had been designed to sabotage Swansea's whole campaign. SW London had raised four objections: (i) that the appeal to vote for the candidate was bigger than the appeal to vote for socialism. How absurd! It was the electoral law that required those who wanted to vote for socialism to vote for a person, so we are obliged to ask for a vote for a specific name; (ii) that the personal pronoun 'I' was used. SW London had given the impression that only 'I' was used whereas the count was 8 'I's and 7 'we's or 'the Socialist Party'; the use of 'I', once again, was designed to give the manifesto a human touch not to attract personal votes; (iii) that the text was weak, but how could the call "to establish a new system of ownership where each person owns everything and takes freely according to their needs" be interpreted as a call for the redistribution of wealth; it was certainly not the sort of thing the Labour Party had said in the 1940s; (iv) that the Declaration of Principles had been printed in too small characters. This objection was so absurd that Comrade Lawrence had not repeated it at ADM today. Swansea branch had particularly objected to a letter from SW London in which it had been stated that "the Swansea campaign must have done a lot of harm in Swansea". Is this the sort of criticism that active branches are expected to accept? Swansea favoured the present system where manifestos were treated as leaflets and vetted by the New Pamphlets Committee.

E. Goodman (W London): Swansea had acted, in putting the candidate's photo on the manifesto, on the basis of a floor resolution whereas they should have waited for an Instructed Resolution at next year's Conference. Her branch had not liked the emphasis on 'I' and she felt that the manifesto could have come from a number of reformist organisations. In the branch's view, election manifestos, even local ones, were a Party not a branch affair; they were not leaflets but official Party statements and so should come from the EC;

B. Roberts (Newcastle): his branch was against the candidate's photo appearing on our election manifestos, but there had been too much negative criticism and pessimistic sniping at Swansea and Dundee over their campaigns. His branch would like to congratulate both branches on their excellent efforts in local elections.

D. Donnelly (Glasgow): it was the photo that stuck in his craw as it went against our boast that we were not seeking personal votes. The matter would now have to be put right at next year's Conference. The manifesto also started "Dear Electors" instead of the traditional "Fellow Workers". This appeared to be a way of changing the Party's approach by the back door. If people wanted to change it they should do so openly and raise

the matter at Conference and not present the Party with a fait accompli. K. Graham (Bristol): his branch liked the Swansea manifesto and had been glad to distribute it during the election. OK, it wasn't perfect, but then nothing was. He could understand that some branches might not like it, but this was inevitable as there was a range of views in the Party on the best approach, which was why it was best to let branches decide on what they thought was best. Much of the criticism was ill-founded and trivial and if members really thought that the Swansea manifesto was reformist and non-socialist then they should go the whole way and bring a charge against Swansea. Otherwise they should not use such terms which, in his view, were clearly out of order under article 15 of Standing Orders.

K. Knight (NW London): his branch agreed with the criticism that SW London and Camden had made of the Swansea and Dundee manifestos. They hadn't liked previous ones either but had been waiting for the tide in the Party to turn. They didn't want the Party case to be watered down nor the Party to turn into a loose federation of branches. Things would not go right in the Party until some centralisation was restored.

C. Slapper (Islington): this year's Conference, perhaps without realising what it was doing, had changed Rule 10 in such a way as to allow branches to produce leaflets without even referring to the New Pamphlets Committee let alone the EC, but the question was: were election manifestos like any other leaflet? Islington was against the use of the candidate's photo on the manifesto and, while respecting the good intentions of those who favoured this, felt that they should have waited for a Conference decision by Instructed Resolution before introducing this substantial innovation to our practice. Whatever might be said, the presence of a photo on the manifesto did suggest an appeal to vote for a person rather than an idea, so weakening our case in answer to anarchists and others who criticised us for taking part in the farce of electioneering. Our answer had been that we did so only reluctantly and on a basis that was not only different but visibly different (e.g. as by having no photo) from the others. Further, if photos are to appear then sooner or later one of the criteria for choosing the candidate will become his or her looks.

D. Devine (Dundee): the Dundee leaflet was perhaps not brilliant but it was still quite good. It was not more democratic to have manifestos vetted by the EC. This demand was a manifestation of a desire to have everything centralised in the Party. In any event, manifestos drawn up by the EC tended to begin "We are the Socialist Party of Great Britain, founded in 1904..." and to lack imagination and passion and be a dry statement of our case in an abstract manner. Dundee was against putting the candidate's photo on the manifesto. Comrade Devine took the occasion to mention his personal reply to Camden branch's criticism of the Dundee manifesto. At the time he felt it appropriate, but he now apologised for the swearing though not for the content.

V. Vanni (Glasgow): the issue of whether or not to put the candidate's photo on the manifesto was perhaps an issue for Conference to settle, but dropping references to capitalism, the working class, etc was not. Glasgow had been accused of nit-picking but they would continue to criticise where they felt criticism to be necessary.

J. Krause (Camden): when Camden had criticised the Dundee manifesto they got a reply. It was offensive, but that didn't matter. More important was the fact that it didn't answer the criticism, which was that there had been no explicit reference to the need to win control of the machinery of government, including the armed forces, and that the use of the term "spiritual fulfilment" was to say the least odd for a party committed to materialism.

S. Coleman (Islington): a real procedural problem had been identified -- who was going to vet election manifestos -- which had to be solved. This was what we should be discussing now since Islington had decided to contest 3 wards in the 1990 local elections, Eccles wanted to contest local elections, so did Swansea and Dundee again, and Belfast too were thinking of this. What he wanted to know was why branches waited till the election was over before raising their criticisms. Islington had been victims of this after the 1979, 1983 and 1987 General Elections; so they knew how

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Swansea and Dundee felt.

S. Easton (EC Member) could not see what tremendous change was involved in putting the candidate's photo on our election manifesto. The only possible argument against it was the illogical one that this was the top of some slippery slope. There was a distinction between an election manifesto (national) and an election address (local) and there was no reason why branches should not have the last word over the address which, after all, they would have to distribute.

P. Deutz (EC Member): the EC had asked branches what they thought of the Swansea manifesto. Of the 10 branches that had replied, 3 saw nothing wrong with it, while 7 had expressed reservations. As regards Dundee's reply to Camden, she thought the EC should not have circulated it before they had asked Dundee to take out the swear words.

L. Cox (EC Member): a floor resolution was not enough to justify a change in our whole approach to elections. Such a major issue required an Instructed Resolution.

P. Lawrence (SW London), winding up, said that Comrade Moss was evading the issues of the personal appeal and of the major shift from a class analysis to an ethical appeal. Such a change should be proposed in an open manner.

E. Moss (Swansea), winding up, said that since only 7 branches had expressed reservations in reply to the EC's question this meant that a majority of branches had not complained about Swansea's manifesto. His branch was not annoyed at criticism as such --the criticism in SW London's more recent circular on local propaganda had been useful and constructive-- but at its manner and tone. He repeated that there was no appeal for a personal vote and he urged members to read the manifesto and judge for themselves whether or not it put the case. It clearly did and he challenged those who denied this to try to prove the contrary in public debate. The Party did have the right to decide the content of local election manifestos centrally, but it was Swansea's view that it was in the Party's better interest to let branches decide.

2. POLICY, PRINCIPLES AND THEORY

18. The Nature of the Ruling Class in State Capitalist Russia.

E. Young (NW London), opening, said the issue was who were the capitalist class in Russia. Were the nomenklatura, i.e. the leaders of the Communist Party, a capitalist class? No, they were not because they could not bequeath or inherit the means of production they controlled. This view, however, was not shared by all members of his branch who kept asking him to identify to whom the surplus value produced in Russia went if it wasn't the nomenklatura.

L. Knight (NW London): surplus value was produced in Russia and the other members of the branch accepted that it went to the nomenklatura even if it wasn't clear by what precise channels.

S. Coleman (Islington): the distribution of surplus value was a secondary question. What was crucial was the production and reproduction of surplus value and this took place in Russia within the framework of the capital/wage-labour relationship. There was a possessing class in Russia of the sort mentioned in Clause 2 of our Declaration of Principles even though this class didn't have legal title to the means of production there. Possession was a mixture of ownership and control that did not necessarily have to involve legal title. A capitalist class was the class which, in Marx's words, "personified capital" acting as "fonctionaries of capital" and such a class existed in Russia.

A. Buick (non-delegate): this issue had come up twenty years ago, at the 1959 Conference, and it was appropriate that it should now be discussed again in view of recent developments in Russia under Gorbachev. At the time two points of view confronted each other: those who argued that the nomenklatura (or bureaucracy as it was then called) could not be a capitalist class because they did not possess legal property titles to means of production which they could inherit and bequeath and those who argued that what was important from a Marxist point of view was social reality not legal forms. The latter view won the day and the Party accepted that there was a group in Russia that could be identified as the

capitalist class because they monopolised, i.e. in practice owned and controlled the means of production, even though they possessed no legal property titles; their monopoly over the means of production was exercised collectively, as a class, not individually. This did not mean that private owners enjoying individual legal property rights did not exist in Russia; they did, but that was not the question. It would be absurd to say that these petty capitalists existing on the margins of legality were the ruling capitalist class in Russia; they were merely a small, very subordinate section of it. The dominant section was the collectively-owning nomenklatura. The fact that the nomenklatura owned the means of production collectively rather than individually explained why the process of the distribution of surplus value was different from in the West: it took place by means of bloated salaries, benefits in kind and other perks and gifts rather than in the legal property forms of rent, interest and profit. This also explained why it was recruited differently: by joining and rising up the hierarchy rather than by inheritance. In arguing against this view that a group had to possess legal inheritance rights before it could be regarded as a class, Comrade Young had employed a Trotskyist not a Marxist argument.

At this point Comrade G. Slapper handed over the chair to Comrade P. Hope. A vote of thanks was moved to Comrade G. Slapper and to Comrade Frank Morgan of the Canteen Committee.

B. Johnson (Swansea): surplus value was channelled to members of the nomenklatura not just as perks and benefits in kind but also as money in the form of inflated salaries; some members of the nomenklatura even received more than one "wage" packet for the posts they occupied.

J. Bradley (Enfield and Haringey) said that what might be called the functional view of a capitalist class had first been clearly expressed in the Party in 1959. According to this view, a capitalist class is defined not by legal title but by the practical functional role it exercises in the process of wage-labour and capital. The group that played this role was a de facto capitalist class as it personified capital. So the capitalist class were those who personified capital, those who actually carried out the role of capitalist in the socio-economic process. For historical reasons in the West this group had been a group of individually-owning property title-holders but, for other historical reasons, in other parts of the world such as Russia it had been a group exercising political power in the context of a nationalised economy. Such a group was a class because it effectively denied access to others to the means of production except on the basis of wage-labour. It was they who made the critical decisions in the capitalist socio-economic process even if they didn't possess personal property rights. As a ruling class they determined what was to be produced, and where and how it was to be produced; they would also like to determine the rate at which it was produced but here they came up against the resistance of the working class. The historical reason why in Russia the capitalist class had taken the form of a class directly exercising political power was that, as a late developer, Russian capitalism needed the State to build up heavy industry, keep out competitors from its home market, and develop its armed forces.

G. Wilson (NW London), replying to the discussion, said that a distinction must be drawn between a capitalist class and a group receiving surplus value. A group could be privileged in terms of consumption but could not be called a capitalist class unless it also possessed ownership rights over capital.

18a. Does the Party Case Need Revision?

18b. The Socialist Party's attitude towards the Anarchist movement.

Glasgow branch withdrew these two Items.
